Living into Our Baptism: That They May Have Life Abundantly

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Abstract

Living into Our Baptism: That They May Have Life Abundantly centers on what it means to live into our baptism—and what such life entails: that no one is left in need, left wanting. Drawing on Acts 2, Psalm 23, 1 Peter 2, and John 10, it proclaims Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd and the Gate into God's Kingdom, who comes that we "may have life, and have it abundantly." The witness of the early Church—sharing all things and distributing to any who have need—shows how Christ's care is made tangible through his people, while Psalm 23 frames this abundant life as life under the Shepherd's leading: "I shall not want," even in the valley's shadow. In 1 Peter, believers are called to endure suffering without retaliation, following the crucified Lord who bore our sins and heals by his wounds—and who, even on the cross, gives himself for those who crucified him. In baptism we enter the Shepherd's fold, die to self, and are raised to new life: abundant life found in following Christ—unconditionally loving, forgiving, and serving, even when harmed. The closing movement returns to Psalm 23, confessing the Shepherd's presence and promise as Christ's light shines through such mercy, making the Kingdom visible, strengthening the Church, and drawing others toward the joy of salvation.

Note. *The abstract was drafted with the assistance of Microsoft Copilot and edited by the author.*

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Christ is the gate to the Kingdom, the good shepherd. And he calls us to enter his kingdom by following his example. What, then, is it for us to follow him into the Kingdom? The readings shed some light on what the answer to this question might be. What are we to make of this?

1. In the first lesson we are called to go forth and feed those who hunger – whether this be hunger of the body or hunger of the soul. "**All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and *distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need*."** (Acts 2.44–45)

2. In the Epistle we are called to endure injustice for the sake of doing so even to the point of death, our giving is to be unconditional. "**For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps."** (1 Pet. 2.21)

3. For Christ has made of himself an example by suffering on the cross so that we might be freed from sin to pursue righteousness. Freed from sin through unconditional forgiveness. In the Gospel reading we have Jesus telling us, "**The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. *I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly*."** (John 10.10)

We begin answering Christ Jesus' call, begin following Him into the pasture, into His Kingdom at baptism. In baptism we die with Christ on the cross and are born anew in His resurrection, die to living to ourselves and are born anew to living into righteousness, by living to God through following Christ's example and living to others. Notably we need others. For ***it is only in our living to and for others regardless of the cost*** **that we live at all as *it is only in our so doing that we follow Christ into the pasture.*** In baptism we are freed from sin and empowered with His gift to us of His Holy Spirit to pursue righteousness, and hence, life. And by ***living into our baptism*** we walk through the gate that **IS Christ** in the pasture, into His fold, into His kingdom.

Christ calls us to walk through the gate by means of others showing forth to us what we will find in His kingdom. And what do we find? We find His light shining forth through others in their ensuring that no one, including ourselves, be in need, left wanting. And when we encounter sorrow, pain, the shadow of death, He, through others comforts us. And when we thus see His light shining forth through others, we hear His calling us to live life abundantly by walking in His light, through the gate, into the pasture, into His Kingdom.

Christ calls us to walk in His light by following His example. He calls us to have life abundantly by our unconditionally being vehicles through which His light shines forth to others so that no one is left wanting, especially to those who would seek to do us harm, which is to say, **unconditionally love, forgive, and seek to help those who unjustly do us harm.** ***Here it is worth noting that Christ dies on the cross for those who crucified Him.*** And when we do this, we live into our baptism and abide in His Kingdom and have life abundantly.

And by our thus living into our baptism by walking in His light ensuring that no one is in need,

left wanting, His light shines forth through us to others and leads them to being saved through Christ. For they begin to see to what God in and through Christ calls them, a life of giving themselves to others as He gives Himself to them through us and no one is left wanting. They begin to feel His voice as it moves their hearts. Through us they feel what it is like for Him to be their rod and staff . And when they do the same, when they begin to walk in the Light of Christ by unconditionally being vehicles through which Christ helps others as He unconditionally helps them through us, His light shines forth through them to others and they feel the joy of salvation, the joy of abundant life, of abiding in His Kingdom. And that kingdom, the Body of Christ in the world, the one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of God, grows.

We are all thus called and led by our Shepherd through the gate and into the pasture, into His Kingdom. When we answer His call, follow Him through the gate into the pasture at Baptism, and eat (gain substance/strength) of the pasture by following Him in act, living into our baptism by walking in His light – unconditionally seeking out, loving, and forgiving others as He unconditionally seeks us out, loves and forgives us – so that no one be in need; when we do this, He, through our relations with each other, feeds our souls; and we shall not want. And when we suffer, He, through each of us, His Body in the world, is with us. And if we endure we will not be harmed, but rather, we will obtain righteousness here and now and hereafter. And **"Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives, and we will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."** (Ps. 23.6) For we know by faith as we sang in our opening hymn: "Lord, by the stripes which wounded Thee, From death's dread sting Thy servants free, That we may live, and sing to Thee; **Alleluia!!!**

Let us pray,

O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people: Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. ***Amen.***

Blessings and Peace to All!!!
+MWH

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